

Sabbath Lesson #12 – The Seal of God and Mark of the Beast: Part 2 – 10-16 Jun 2023

Christ would have us understand the prophecies to prepare for His second coming. We start by noticing the power that in the past persecuted God's people, of which John says, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). "Power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." And, says the prophet, "I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death." And again: "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword." The forty and two months are the same as the "time and times and the dividing of time," three years and a half, or 1260 days, of Daniel 7 — the time during which the papal power was to oppress God's people. This period, as stated in preceding chapters, began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 538, and terminated in 1798. At that time the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity." {GC 439.2}.

Sunday: The Deadly Wound – What does the prophecy say about the deadly wound that the papacy received and the future career of the papacy? "The influence of Rome in the countries that once acknowledged her dominion is still far from being destroyed. And prophecy foretells a restoration of her power. "I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast." Verse 3. The infliction of the deadly wound points to the downfall of the papacy in 1798. After this, says the prophet, "his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast." Paul states plainly that the "man of sin" will continue until the second advent. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8. To the very close of time he will carry forward the work of deception. And the revelator declares, also referring to the papacy: "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life." Revelation 13:8. In both the Old and the New World, the papacy will receive homage in the honor paid to the Sunday institution, that rests solely upon the authority of the Roman Church" {GC 578.3}.

Monday: The Falling Away – How does the "falling away" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) explain the genesis of Church Councils – the Council of Nicaea, Trent, etc – that came to define beliefs? The story of the Church Councils shows how easy it is for men destitute of genuine religion to be zealously and even violently religious. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Human nature is a collection of contradictions, and unless God rules in the heart, laying bare its perversity and renewing it, it is bound to deceive its possessor. Here, for instance, were men discussing about the nature of Christ, and exhibiting on both sides the very nature of the devil. What was the trouble? First, it was not to become partakers of the Divine nature by partaking of the Word, that they were holding controversy; but each had opinions and definitions for which they contended, in pride and hatred demanding that others should accept, not the gracious Word of God, and the power of Christ for practical life, or the character of the meek and lowly Jesus, but rather their definitions and views about the Lord. The Lord sent the believers, forth to "preach the Word," to speak all the words of this life. The aim was reformation of life by the power of God, and it was wrought, too, wherever the Word was received as the Word of life. Very soon after the days of the apostles, however, and even in their days, departure from the faith and disputings about words came in, and the result is seen in the controversies of these times, which led up to the Papacy and the supremacy of human authority over the Divine.

And as it was not to become partakers of the life and to lead into deeper holiness that debates and strifes were inaugurated and Councils met to thresh out human theories, so, too, there was a second motive at work. The theory represented a cause, and it was the aim of the promoter to lift himself into place of power or position of honour as leader of a following. The pride of opinion and the love of power are everywhere apparent in the whole sad story. Human nature is the same in all ages. The natural man is a fighter. If he be a religious man, still unredeemed from the state of nature, he will love religious strife. Paul's two epistles to Timothy show how this element caused trouble in the apostolic church. It was the beginning of the "falling away." Of the temperament of the theological fighter the Lord

said by the apostle: "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth" (1 Timothy 6:4-5). Yet the typical controversialist is the one who thinks he knows, and he excuses all the strife by urging his fervour for truth. It is difficult to explain to such the difference between firmness for the truth and contentiousness about theories of truth. But it is the difference between preaching the truth to win souls to the Lord, and arguing to convince some one of the superiority of a certain view, which really means of one's own superiority. If the enemy cannot altogether keep men indifferent to truth, he perverts the truth, setting all wind of doctrine for men to strive about. No one is so difficult to help as the one to whom the name of Jesus suggests but a mere theory about His nature.

Tuesday: Satan's Final Strategy – What strategy is Satan already engineering for the final deception? "The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude. The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones" (Ellen G White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 9, 1909, p 11).

Wednesday: The Mark of the Beast – The third angel warns that no man should receive the Mark of the Beast "in his forehead, or in his hand" (Revelation 14:9). What is the mark of the beast? "As the sign of the authority of the Catholic Church, papist writers cite "the very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, which Protestants allow of; ... because by keeping Sunday, they acknowledge the church's power to ordain feasts, and to command them under sin."—Henry Tuberville, An Abridgment of the Christian Doctrine, page 58. What then is the change of the Sabbath, but the sign, or mark, of the authority of the Roman Church—"the mark of the beast"?" {GC 448.1}. Is Sunday worship the mark of the beast? Not until Sunday law is passed. "But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshiping the beast and his image. As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome — "the mark of the beast." And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive "the mark of the beast." – Ellen White {GC 449.1}.

Thursday: The Sabbath Test – What are we told about the Sabbath test? "The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty ... While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God" {GC 605}. "As the movement for Sunday enforcement becomes more bold and decided, the law will be invoked against commandment keepers. They will be threatened with fines and imprisonment, and some will be offered positions of influence, and other rewards and advantages, as inducements to renounce their faith" "As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them" {GC 607.1; 608.2}.